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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 000837

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR - ANDRE CADIEUX, VELIA DE PIRRO
INR/IAA - BOB CARHART
WHA/EPSC - MATT ROONEY
INL/LP -AIMEE MARTIN
INL/G-TIP - BARBARA FLECK
TREASURY FOR ERIN NEPHEW
JUSTICE FOR ROBERT LIPMAN

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KCOR, IBRD, IABD, JM, XL
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: CHARISMATIC FORMER PRIME MINISTER PORTIA
SIMPSON-MILLER (PSM) RE-ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE OPPOSITION
PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PARTY (PNP)

REF: A. KINGSTON 766 (021439Z SEP 08)
[1](#)B. KINGSTON 647 (221203Z JUL 08)
[1](#)C. KINGSTON 364 (291558Z APR 08)
[1](#)D. 07 KINGSTON 1336 (042044Z SEP 07)

Classified By: Charge' d' Affaires a.i. James T. Heg, reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d)

Summary and Analysis

1.(C) The charismatic former Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson-Miller (PSM) has retained the presidency of the opposition People's National Party (PNP), fending off a challenge from the veteran former Minister of National Security, Dr. Peter Phillips, in convincing fashion. The Party thus has taken a step toward unity by finally resolving doubts about its leadership. Yet, it will be a long road before the PNP's deep rifts are healed and it can assume the role of an effective opposition party: both challenging, and cooperating with, the sitting government on issues of national importance.

2.(C) The coming weeks will offer high political drama, as the configuration of PSM's shadow cabinet and the future role of Phillips and his faction begin to emerge. If he and his supporters are relegated to the back-benches and excluded from policymaking, the future direction of the Opposition will hinge on PSM's choice of advisors. Encouragingly, over recent weeks she has relied heavily on a younger, more pragmatic team including Basil Waite, Ian Hayles, and Damion Crawford, and has distanced herself from discredited loyalists like Colin Campbell, Phillip Paulwell, and Donald Buchanan. PSM's decisive reelection as PNP President reflects the resonance of her populist message among ordinary Jamaicans, who have been battered by hurricanes Dean and Gustav and struggle with an alarming crime wave, high inflation, grinding unemployment, and weak infrastructure.
End Summary and Analysis.

Background: a Fractured Party Drawn Toward a Showdown

3.(SBU) Jamaica's opposition People's National Party (PNP), voted out of office in 2006 after 18 years in power, held its long-awaited leadership election on September 20. As noted reftels, this was the final move in a game of three-dimensional political chess underway since 2002. The charismatic former Prime Minister (PM) Portia Simpson-Miller (PSM) retained the presidency of the Party, winning the votes of a convincing 2,332 delegates, while her challenger, the veteran former Minister of National Security Dr. Peter Phillips, captured only 1,959. Moreover, PSM loyalists Angela Brown-Burke, Derrick Kellier, and Noel Arscott won three of the Party's Vice Presidential slots; the fourth went to Dr. Fenton Ferguson, who now will be the only Phillips supporter among in the Party's senior leadership.

4.(SBU) Initially slated to be carried out over three days, the annual conference had been scaled back to a single election day, per a September 9 public announcement by Party Chairman Robert Pickersgill, ostensibly to limit the public's view of party factionalism; many analysts speculated that the real reason was a lack of funds to hold a longer event. In the lead-up to the election, the party's long-simmering disunity (reftels A,B,C) played out in the media, with members of the two contending factions exchanging verbal salvos and, on several occasions, coming dangerously close to violent attacks. PSM loyalists accused Phillips of rank opportunism and hypocrisy, claiming he had been an architect of the party's platform but now was criticizing it in order to fragment the PNP and secure a win. The Phillips camp maintained that PSM's failed leadership had cost the PNP the 2006 election (reftel D), and she thus was no longer the

right choice to lead the Party.

5.(SBU) Local media covered the leadership contest daily, allowing both sides to make their case until Chairman Pickersgill issued a September 10 "gag order" prohibiting the candidates' spokespersons from talking to reporters. In late August, a group called "Comrades for Change" had posted anti-PSM attack ads on the internet, and on September 9 the Gleaner newspaper reported that a similar, unidentified group had posted similar ads again. (Note: Post was unable to locate these ads, which may have been removed because of libel concerns.) In a September 17 private meeting with Poloff, PNP party activist Ludlow Rennicks confirmed that Phillips and PSM both had approved the list of 4,438 delegates to the convention. The next day, Pickersgill completed heavy security arrangements for the vote; no one was to be admitted to the national stadium without proper identification. The respected Electoral Office of Jamaica was slated to conduct the balloting in accordance with national regulations.

Comment and Analysis: Deep Wounds, Slow to Heal

6.(C) In the minds of the PNP's rank and file, to whom the populist PSM always has been a champion of ordinary Jamaicans, the election results are definitive. Nevertheless, as the Foreign Ministry's Bilateral Relations Director Courtenay Rattray noted to Poloff in a recent private conversation, in formally determining the Leader of the Opposition, Jamaica's constitution does not take internal party elections into account: only the Governor General has the authority to appoint the Leader of the Opposition, based on his assessment of which MP enjoys the most support among opposition parliamentarians. Hitherto, of the 28 PNP MPs, a majority have supported Phillips rather than PSM. However, in Post's estimate it is unlikely that PNP parliamentarians would publicly defy the September 20 Party election results by asking the Governor General to appoint Phillips as Opposition Leader; such an unprecedented move would unleash an uproar, and possibly tear the Party -- and perhaps some of its members -- to pieces. The PNP now has taken a step toward unity by finally resolving long-standing doubts about its leadership. Yet, it will be a long road before the rifts are healed and the Party can assume the role of an effective

opposition: both challenging, and cooperating with, the
sitting government on issues of national importance.
HEG